

ATTENDANCE POLICY

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Rationale

Excellent education is vital to the lives of all children and society. Whilst life chances of children may not be equal from the outset, education can help redress this imbalance and ensure that every child has an opportunity to fulfil their potential. School attendance is an essential foundation to enabling this potential and raising pupil attainment. School absence for whole and part days can seriously disrupt continuity of learning, self-worth and future life chances. Not only does a child miss out on taught lessons, but additionally may miss valuable opportunities to consolidate past learning and consequently face difficulties catching up academically and socially on their return or arrival in school.

The context of this policy recognises that cumulative absence rates mean that:

- 95% attendance is equal to half a day of lost learning every two weeks for a whole year
- 90% attendance is equal to a whole day of lost learning days every two weeks for a whole year
- 85% attendance is equal to one and a half days of lost learning every two weeks for a whole year
- 80% attendance is equal to one whole day of lost learning every week for a whole year

Poor or irregular attendance places children at risk, can contribute to contextual safeguarding and welfare concerns and in some cases can result in them being drawn into patterns of anti-social or criminal behaviour and exposure to exploitation. To this end, the Department for Education (DfE) recognises that some pupils find it harder than others to attend school and that the best outcomes for pupils will be achieved when all parties work together to secure excellent attendance.

This policy represents our commitment to support pupils to achieve 100% attendance. It reflects how parents and the whole school community share the responsibility for supporting and promoting excellent school attendance and punctuality and sets out the:

- Principles, procedures and practice the school will undertake.
- Strategies to improve attendance and rewards and benefits of good attendance
- Sanctions and possible legal consequences of poor attendance and punctuality

For consistency, the term parent / parents refers to any adult who is the birth or foster parent, the carer or guardian of a child in St Joseph's Catholic Primary School

PURPOSE STATEMENT

The purpose of this policy is to support multi agency working and ensure that this policy:

- Assists the Local Authority (LA), through the DfE, to work within a legal framework and discharge its duties with regard to ensuring that a child for whom they are responsible is receiving a suitable education by regular attendance at school or otherwise.

- Support schools to fulfil their legal responsibilities with regard to pupil attendance. In doing so, creating a framework which promotes consistent practices and procedures that improves school attendance across Wiltshire
- Provides information and a framework to help schools devising a whole School Attendance Policy.
- Identifies areas of responsibility.
- Promotes partnership between the LA, schools and parent/carers by offering guidance and assistance in meeting their responsibilities in this area.

Policy Aims

We believe that the foundation for good attendance is based on a strong partnership between school, parents and the child. As a Catholic Primary School, where parents are seen the “first educators of the child” a positive and collaborative relationship is even more essential if we are to enable parents meet their faith and legal responsibilities.

This means that we are expecting each pupil to have 100% attendance. Pupils who miss just 3 days of school in a school year will contribute to the school not achieving the attendance target set by the governing body.

To support this goal, we aim to provide clear communication with parents and pupils regarding our expectations of how to secure excellent attendance for pupils at our school.

At St Joseph’s Catholic Primary School, the school’s values are reflected in the aims of this policy by ensuring that:

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| Aspiration | ☐ School staff see that enabling learning every day as their responsibility in fulfilling their obligations to live out the charism foundations of the school.
☐ All children see the value and privilege of the opportunities from being in school and that by attending, this is the gateway to learning and as such the reward for future good attendance and punctuality.
☐ Where necessary poor attendance is challenged relentlessly in the interests of the child and their future opportunities.
☐ Sets high aspirations for attendance by providing regular information about attendance through whole school and personal communication with parents. |
| Resilience | ☐ Recognises that sometimes coming to school can seem like a challenge but, as with all challenges, overcoming these is essential if children are to develop the tenacity to overcome the difficulties they face in life.
☐ Where needed the school works with parents and children to help them develop the resilience to overcome barriers that may affect their attendance. |
| Service | ☐ Beyond their legal responsibilities, parents see their child’s attendance as one of the keyways they can demonstrate and live out their Catholic faith as the “first educators of the child.”
☐ School staff and governors see the enabling of good attendance as part of their responsibilities and privileges endowed upon them by parents who have ultimate responsibility for their child’s education. |
| Curiosity | ☐ Children see access to good Catholic education as a gift and as such see unnecessary missed days at school as lost opportunities. |
| Respect | ☐ The school will respectfully and compassionately work with parents and their child to achieve maximum attendance. |

Peace

- ☐ We foster good relationships with parents so that all children, regardless of need, have a right to good quality education and recognising that missed learning can impact on a child's life chances.
- ☐ We create a learning environment where children feel cared for and love coming to school and love learning. As such we want children to choose to be in school over staying away from lessons.

Roles and Responsibilities

The law says that ensuring a child receives education is a parent/carer's legal responsibility (Section 444 of the 1996 Education Act). For most parents this means registering their child at a school. Permitting absence from school that is not authorised by the school creates an offence in law and parents/carers who do not secure their child's regular attendance at school may be issued with a Penalty Notice or referred to the Wiltshire Education Welfare Service for prosecution in the magistrates' court.

To avoid this happening we will work with parents and carers to address irregular or poor attendance to ensure full-time attendance.

Authorised absences are those that have been agreed by the St Joseph's Catholic Primary School's headteacher. Unauthorised absences are those where no valid reason has been provided for absence or those absences for which the headteacher has not agreed.

By law St Joseph's Catholic Primary School is required to and will:

- Take an attendance register twice a day (see registration section below). This will be at the start of the morning and afternoon session.
- Report to the Local Authority any pupils who fail to attend regularly or who are absent for ten consecutive school days or more without known reason.

Partnership Working – roles and responsibilities

At St Joseph's Catholic Primary School good attendance is the business of everyone in our school community. To support good attendance St Joseph's Catholic Primary School believes it is essential that the school and parents work closely together to ensure children attend school regularly. The following section outlines what these responsibilities normally look like.

School Staff responsibilities

The governors and all staff are committed to supporting pupils achieve excellent attendance and regularly review school procedures and strategies to support this. To ensure this:

Class teachers will:

- Ensure the attendance register is taken twice a day. These registers show for every session, whether a pupil is present, absent, attending approved educational activity or unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances.
- Share concerns with school leaders about pupils whose absence is affecting their educational, personal, social and emotional outcomes. Office staff will:
- Maintain the school's record of attendance and punctuality and will always follow up absence to assure themselves of the reasons for unconfirmed absence or to understand how the child is recovering.
- Act under the instruction of school leaders to follow up persistent absence, (verbally and in writing)
- Inform the educational welfare service of absences that exceed 10 sessions or 5 days within any rolling period of 10 school weeks.

School leaders will:

- Monitor attendance and punctuality alongside office staff on a daily basis.
- Instruct office staff to follow up persistent or worrying absence.
- Contact the children's services where there are concerns about the welfare of a child or where a child's frequency of absence may significantly limit their life chances.
- Work with parents in the first instance to take action to improve attendance and where attendance fails to improve, escalate this work to include the educational welfare service or wider children's services.

- Report to governors at least three times a year what patterns are being observed with respect to school attendance and where actions have been identified, the outcomes of these. Where attendance becomes a concern, school leaders may increase the frequency of their reporting.

Parents' responsibilities

Parents can support the work they have entrusted to the school for the education of their child by:

- Ensuring children arrive at school on time, before registers close, appropriately dressed and in a 'condition to learn' (i.e. not too tired or too hungry) and with the right equipment for the day.
- Working in partnership with us to help their child(ren) gain an appreciation of the importance of learning and as a result attending school regularly.
- Working in partnership with the school to take an active interest in their child's education and learning experiences.
- Working in partnership with us and other agencies (as appropriate) to resolve problems relating to non-attendance or which may have a negative impact on their attendance and educational, personal, social and emotional outcomes.

School Organisation and Procedures

The school day:

- The school day starts at 08:50 and the school gates open at 08:30.
- The school day finishes at 15:20 (KS1) and 15:25 (KS2) and the gates open at 15:20.

Registration:

The school register is taken twice a day and remains open for 10 minutes to allow for unforeseen eventualities

- Morning register is taken at 08:50 and remains open until 09:05.
- Afternoon register is taken at 13:00 and remains open until 13:10.

Pupils arriving after the start of the school day but before the registers have closed will be marked as late (L). Pupils arriving after the registers have closed will be coded U (Late after registers close). A U code means that the pupil is recorded and given an unauthorised absence for the whole session.

Absence is recorded as unauthorised until a satisfactory reason is provided. If the reason given is not satisfactory and/or evidence of the reason cannot be provided, the absence will be coded as unauthorised.

Ongoing and repeated lateness after the register closes is considered as an unauthorised absence. Where this is the case, we will follow our procedures to ensure that attendance improves. This may include attendance meetings and / or the issuing of penalty notices. Frequent and consistent late arrival is taken seriously as it constitutes and adds to cumulative loss in learning time.

We will contact parents to address and improve attendance and punctuality where:

- A pupil's attendance is approaching 90% as we are required to contact the Education Welfare Service once attendance falls below 90%.
- A pupil has more than 3 weeks where they haven't achieved full attendance in a term (In Wiltshire there are 6 terms in an academic year).
- A pupil has more than 4 recorded lates in a term.
- A pupil has a regular pattern of absence or late arrival.

What we do when a child is marked as absent

- On the first day of absence, contact will be made by the school to the parent/carer if we have not been informed about an absence. This is undertaken after the register closes (09:05).
- We will always contact the parent/carer if a child is absent and the parent/carer has not advised that the child will not be in school.

- Reconfirm absence if subsequent absences are reported by parent. Parents can expect contact on every occasion of an un-notified absence.

If we cannot speak directly with parents/carers then we will make contact with nominated emergency contacts to establish the reason for absence; this is in line with school safeguarding procedures. If after 3 days of absence, your child has not been seen and no contact has been made with the school, a home visit will be made by school staff, to ascertain the safety and well-being of your child and establish the reason for absence from school.

After 10 days of unexplained absence and no contact with the school, we are obliged to notify the local authority. This time period may be shorter than the 10 day period if we have serious concerns about the welfare of the child. In both cases the local authority will follow their procedures for Children Missing from Education (CME) and parents may expect contact and visits from an Education Welfare Officer to ascertain the well-being and safety of your child.

- Where attendance or punctuality falls below required levels (90%) the school will call a meeting with the parent / carer and establish a Home / School agreement through a Parenting Contract (voluntary). This will include reference to regular and punctual attendance.
- Where attendance after the Parent Contract meeting has failed to improve and sustain attendance the school will contact the Educational Welfare Officer and follow the procedures outlined below with respect to informing the Local Authority, Penalty Notice Officer:
 - Work with the parent, class teacher and EWO to agree procedures for a child's return to full time education following long term absence.
 - Communicate our expectation that medical or dental appointments are taken out of school hours where possible.
 - Make contact with children's services immediately when a child on a child protection plan has an absence from school. Other children who are SEND, on child in need or early help plans will be monitored as appropriate and actions taken to ensure good attendance and punctuality.
 - Communicate our procedures for requesting pupil leave of absence for exceptional circumstances during term time.
 - Set clear expectations that a parent/carers will inform the school of circumstances which are or may affect their child's attendance at school.

Actions relating to unauthorised absence (late after register closes (U), no reason given (N), other unauthorised absence (O) or unauthorised holiday (G))

- ☐ Where a child has 8 unauthorised register marks (U, N, O or G) in any academic year, the school will warn and inform the parent / carer that further absence will trigger a penalty notice.
- ☐ Where 10 unauthorised register marks (U, N, C or G) are recorded in any given academic year the school will automatically inform the penalty notice officer.

What parents and carers can do when a child is or could be absent or late in arriving:

- Notify the school when their child is unable to attend, with a reason, on the first and subsequent days of the absence. Parents should make contact with school before the start of the school day. Please phone (the absence line/school office/ member of staff).
- Keep the school informed on a daily basis in cases of ongoing absence. A note from a pupil's home does not mean an absence becomes authorised. The decision whether or not to authorise an absence will always remain with the school.
- Arrange medical or dental appointments outside of school hours unless there is urgent need for an appointment.
- Tell the school if their child is going to be late, the reason why and expected time of arrival. ☐ Only request leave of absence/holiday in term time if it is for an exceptional circumstance.

Requesting absence from school

Parents and carers can request an absence from school. This, however, does not necessarily mean that the absence will be authorised and consequently if the parent or carer keeps their child off school, the parent or carer may be asked to attend an attendance meeting or may be issued with a penalty notice.

Parents should always request absence using the school's Leave of Absence Request forms. These must be completed in advance of the absence and contain as much information about why the absence must be taken in school time. If a request is for exceptional circumstances we will require written confirmation from a third party explaining the extenuating circumstances. We require at least two weeks' notice unless an absence is related to an emergency. We do not give retrospective agreement for absence so any absence not advised in advance will be marked as unauthorised. Requests will be considered by the headteacher and parents and carers will be advised if their request is agreed.

Any pupil who has taken a term time holiday will be required to provide medical evidence if they are ill in the period directly before or after the dates advised to school. Parents/carers will be asked to provide "third party" evidence if a pupil does not return to school on the agreed date following a holiday e.g. proof of delayed or cancelled flights or other travel arrangements.

What absence requests might be authorised?

In accordance with Department for Education guidance, leave of absence from school including for holidays in term-time, may only be authorised in exceptional circumstances.

Examples of exceptional circumstances may include:

- The death or funeral of a person in the immediate family.
- The terminal illness of a person in the immediate family.
- Attendance at a significant religious event.
- Attending a Home Office appointment where the child is required to be present.
- Service personnel and other employees who cannot take leave outside term time at any point in the academic year.

Parents are required to complete a leave of absence request form which must detail the exceptional circumstances for which the leave has been requested. Where service personnel or other employees are requesting term time leave, the absence request form must include a written confirmation from the employer on headed paper or official e-mail confirming that leave cannot be taken during a school holiday period.

What absence requests will not be authorised?

Examples of absence requests that will not be considered reasonable and which will not be authorised are:

- Going shopping with parents.
- Special rewards.
- Cheaper or less expensive holidays.
- Holidays that have been defined by a parent as of educational value.
- Holidays that are a prize from a competition.
- Birthdays.
- Minding other younger children in the family.
- Attending the wedding of a family friend.
- Staying at home because other members in the family are unwell unless not doing so will breach guidance and legislation relating to COVID-19 (Coronavirus).
- Day trips and holidays in term time unless there are exceptional circumstances that have been approved by the Head Teacher.
- Arriving at school too late to get a present mark (After the close of registration).
- Death of a pet.

In all cases, the examples of what can and cannot be authorised is not an exhaustive list. Authorisation is at the Headteacher's discretion and will or will not be agreed after consultation with the school's Educational Welfare Officer. The general principle remains, children should be in school in term time and lost days to learning can affect outcomes educationally, socially and emotionally. For this reason, on almost all occasions, absence requests will not be authorised.

What happens if an absence is unauthorised?

Where an unauthorised leave of absence is taken, the school will inform the educational welfare officer and the Penalty Notice Officer where cumulative unauthorised absence is 10 sessions (5 school days) or more within a rolling period of 10 school weeks. Parents will then be issued with a penalty notice. This will be the sum of £160 **per parent / carer** for **each child** in the family that was absent from school. This sum will be reduced to £80 **per parent/carers** for **each child** if paid within 21 days of issue. Failure to pay the fine after 28 days may lead to prosecution for the absence.

If parents are prosecuted and attend court because their child hasn't been attending school, they can get a fine of up to £2,500. Money raised via fines is only used by the local authority to cover the costs of administering the system, and to fund attendance support. Any extra money is returned to the government.

Collecting your child from school

All parents must ensure they are able to collect their child from school on time (15:20 KS1 or 15:25 KS2). If parents are unable to do this they must communicate the alternative arrangements with the school. This communication should be verbally by phone and by the parent or as an e-mail to the school using the parent's registered e-mail. We may ask a verbal communication to be confirmed by e-mail.

We will not release children in these circumstances to anyone who we have not been advised of. If a child remains uncollected we will make every effort to contact the parent up until 15:30. We will then place the child in the school's after school provision for which we will make a charge for the first and then subsequent hours.

Parents will be charged at the school's Pot Luck rate for this provision. This is as follows: □ 15:20 –

16:30 £4.60

- 16:30 – 17:30 an additional £4.60
- 17:30 – 18:00 an additional £2.60

Monitoring attendance

Daily, weekly and termly monitoring of the registers is made by the office staff, to analyse overall absence for each pupil and identify pupils with low attendance, a pattern of absences that may lead to Persistent Absence (PA), Severe Absence (SA) patterns and levels of broken weeks, lateness, authorised absence and unauthorised absence and reasons for absence.

A pupil is classed as a persistent absentee when they miss 10% or more schooling across the school year and as a severe absentee if they miss more than 50% of schooling for whatever reason, whether it be authorised or unauthorised, or a mixture of both. Absence at this level is doing considerable damage to a child's educational prospects and we need parents' full support and encouragement to tackle it. PA and SA pupils are tracked and monitored carefully through our pastoral system, and we combine this with tracking academic progress to assess the effect on the pupil's attainment.

Absence for whatever reason disadvantages a pupil by creating gaps in learning. The head teacher and or SENDCo will be responsible for putting in place actions for each pupil of concern. Initially we will try to resolve the problem with parents/carers and this may involve requesting medical evidence in order for the school to authorise any further absence due to ill health and/or an attendance meeting with the designated teachers outlined above. We may ask parents to agree to a Parenting Contract which details how we will work together to improve attendance. If absence continues the school may make a referral to the Local Authority for interventions that may include penalty notices and court action.

Strategies and maintaining good attendance

School ethos

We are a caring school community where the needs of all pupils are carefully considered. We promote a culture where education is valued and seen as a gift. All staff are also part of a culture where all children are valued and as such we aim to provide and promote a welcoming and positive atmosphere where pupils feel safe, and know that their presence is valued.

Rewards and recognition

We take every opportunity to promote excellent attendance for all pupils. We celebrate excellent attendance by:

- Weekly house points within classes for houses who have the highest attendance and punctuality.
- Weekly class awards / certificates in celebration worship to recognise the class with the best attendance.
- Termly award to children with 100% attendance and punctuality.
- Termly communication to parents whose child has 100% attendance and punctuality.

Collaboration

If there are specific issues which might impact on a child's attendance we ask that parents see us as partners in this work and that they talk to us so that we can support them and their child. School contact should be initially through the

class teacher but can also include senior school leaders (Paul Bacon) or the SENDCo. Following this we may put in place additional pastoral support (ELSA, Parent Support or talking therapies).

We are very keen to listen to the views of children and parents with regard to attendance matters and we welcome any feedback which helps us to shape how we work with families to address attendance issues and reward excellent attendance.

External advice and support

There may be times when we ask other agencies to become involved to help us understand and work with parents to encourage regular school attendance. (e.g. Wiltshire Council, school health, Ethnic Minority and Traveller Advisory Service, Medical Needs Reintegration Service). If we feel that this would be helpful we will discuss with you first.

Consequences of persistent and severe absence

We will always work with parents to address any attendance concerns. If we have been unable to resolve an issue, despite a number of interventions, then we will refer the matter to the local authority who may take further legal action. This legal action is detailed above. For persistent absence this will or may also include:

- ☐ Action under the Children Act 1989 to protect the welfare and development of the child.

Monitoring and Evaluation

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of procedures and strategies, the attendance policy will be monitored and reviewed on a regular basis. This will take the form of:

- Daily, weekly and termly monitoring as specified above.
- Monthly safeguarding reviews by the DSL team against vulnerable pupils.
- Termly evaluation against the school's attendance target and reporting to the EWS as appropriate. ☐ Termly leadership reviews of pupil performance against academic outcomes.
- Leadership reporting to the school's governing body through ongoing curriculum and full governor meeting reports.
- Annual leadership reviews of pupil performance against the school's annual report on academic outcomes.
- Governor's annual reviews of performance.

The annual review of the Attendance Policy will be undertaken each October alongside the Pupil Premium Policy and SEND Policy by school leaders including governors. This review is undertaken so that the school can assure itself that the policy continues to meet the needs of the school community and reflects current DfE and Local Authority guidance.

Sharing our Attendance Policy with staff and parents

Staff are asked to familiarise themselves with this policy contents each year as part of the school's start of year organisation. Office staff are consulted on policy content at the review points each year.

All new parents are introduced to the policy and information on attendance is included in the school prospectus. This is also accessible on the school website. All parents are sent electronic copies of this prospectus at the start of each academic year and any changes to policy are highlighted in covering information at this time.

School attendance features are included in school newsletters and communications and we advise parents of changes to policy and procedures as and when needed.

Our policy is available in other languages if required.